family.——A powder magazine establishment with four large magazines, tanks, drainage, &c. are about to be formed near Devonport for the ordnance, on plans prepared at the local office of Royal Engineers.——On Thursday week the chief stone of an enlarged building for the Plymouth Mechanics' Institute was laid on the site of the original building, which was erected in 1827 for 300 members, increased latterly to 800. Part of the south front is to be incorporated with the new building. A bottle containing a scroll of particulars was found in razing the old building. When exposed to the sun it suddenly exploded—the bottle, not the scroll—which latter recorded the names of Mr. John Foulston as the architect, and Mr. W. Burgoine, the builder. A new bottle with scroll recording the names of Messrs. Wightwick and Damant as the architects, and Mr. T. Marshall as the builder of the new institute, and accompanied by the old scroll, was placed in the new foundation.——Efforts are being made to erect national schools in Limekiln-lane, Tranmere. Land has been presented by the lord of the manor, and plans by Mr. Barry. ——It is intended very shortly to make a survey and valuation of the rateable property of the parish of Birmingham.——A monument has just been erected in St. John's church, Manchester, with a shilling subscription, in memory of William Marsden, who presided over the committee which obtained for Manchester, in 1843, the Saturday half-holiday. The design was by Messrs. Travis and Mangnall, architects, executed by Mr. John Mowbray, jun. of Cheetwood, and is in the Gothic style, divided into three niches, in its width, filled with sculpture in high relief, those on either side intended to represent mental and physical improvement,—the chief objects for which the half-holiday was obtained. The monument is in stone from Caen.——A new beam engine of 150 horse power has been erected at the Hull Waterworks. The cylinder is 75 inches in diameter, stroke 10 feet; length of beam, 34 feet 8½ inches. Each stroke raises 315½ gallons of water; quantity per minute, 2,841½ gallons, or 2,046,060 gallons in twenty-four hours. There are nearly 300 tons of iron in the engine.——The decorative renovation of Holyrood Palace for the anticipated visit of her Majesty and the Prince to Edinburgh in the autumn is nearly completed. The project for a statue in the quadrangle is in successful progress, and the work is to be entrusted to Mr. H. Ritchie, sculptor.——The citizens of Edinburgh are endeavouring to enable Mr. Park to execute his colossal statue of Sir William Wallace. On Thursday in last week a preliminary meeting was held in the Royal Hotel, to promote measures to have a cast made from it. The work has been in progress for some time, and is ultimately intended to serve as a model for a group commemorative of one whom popular legend has long regarded as the "deliverer of Scotland." The Lord Provost presided. Mr. Sheriff Gordon proposed a resolution in favour of a subscription for enabling the model to be completed, and a cast in plaster made, to be then exhibited, to enable the public to judge whether it should be erected in a more permanent form. The resolution was cordially adopted, and about 70*l.* subscribed, including handsome contributions from the Duke of Buccleuch, the Marquis of Breadalbane, the Lord Provost, the Solicitor-General, Mr. Sheriff Gordon, Professor Wilson, and various others.

DECAY OF ENCAUSTIC TILES.

HAVING several encaustic tiles to spare from the paving of the chancel of my church, I accidentally piled them upon one another and placed them in the middle of the floor of a newly built room in my house, which was plastered all round. The windows of the room were open all day to admit the sun and air to dry the plaster, but were closed at night. The tiles remained unnoticed in the room about three weeks. At the end of that time, when the tiles were about to be removed elsewhere, it was discovered that those which were of a blue coloured pattern were shivered into many pieces, while the plain red and buff coloured pattern ones were uninjured. Were the broken tiles affected by any influence of the hot lime on the walls of the room, or the hot steam from the walls when the windows of the room were closed at night? I cannot account for the circumstance otherwise, as the blue tiles have now been laid down nearly four years in my church, and all are still perfectly sound.

GEORGE BRAMBETER.

We cannot account for the circumstance mentioned. An encaustic tile properly made and fired, could not be affected in such a manner by any ordinary agency, atmospheric or chemical. In order to test the suggestion we caused several blue and buff tiles to be immersed in a covered pail with a quantity of flare lime through the whole process of slaking, and then plunged into cold water, but we need hardly say without the slightest effect. If we had one of the tiles *not broken*, the circumstance could probably be explained.

Books.

Specification and Estimate, with Plans, Sections, &c., of a Pair of Cottages for Labourers, by Mr. H. GODDARD, Architect, for which the Royal Agricultural Society awarded first prize. London: Messrs. Dean. Messrs. Dean have published the plans, &c. of this design, uniform with the designs by Mr. Hine, and Mr. S. J. Nichol, (previously published by them), to which the Society of Arts awarded prizes in 1848. The cost of the pair of cottages is set forth at 200*l.* 17*s.* 11*d.* and the offices 34*l.* 15*s.* The plan does not present any peculiarities.

The Family Friend, vol. 2. London: Houlston and Stoneman, Paternoster-row.

Few perhaps of the little volumes made up by periodical instalments possess more varied and improving matter of interest to the young, and even to the old, than the one just handed us for review,—namely, the 2nd vol. of the "Family Friend," now issued. This little journal forms a neat and handy volume, well got up in all respects. The circulation, it appears, has increased from 50,000 monthly at the close of the first volume, to 75,000 fortnightly, at the present time. Nearly all it contains is copyright matter, of which, including numerous woodcuts, we have 380 pages for half-a-crown. It comprises mechanics, cookery, gardening, poetry, music, statistics, pastime, tales, needle-work, receipts, and a host of other subjects, with an appendix of useful and curious matter.

In turning over the leaves of this little work we may incidentally remark that we have stumbled on a brief note, which we may here quote, both as a small specimen of its own style and as an accidental and pleasing coincidence with the subject of a note of our own some weeks ago on the decomposition of water and oxygen. "Although these bodies (the 'elements') have hitherto resisted all attempts at decomposition, it is highly probable that many of them will be proved to be compounds: indeed, it is possible that all matter may be composed of one material or ultimate atom, the varied position or electrical condition of which produces the variety of form and nature which we perceive in the bodies we now term 'simple bodies' or elements. Sir Isaac Newton entertained this idea, and many distinguished men have expressed a similar opinion. If this discovery were made, the dreams of the alchemists would be practicable, as the transmutation of metals is but the disintegration and rearrangement of atomic particles. For some interesting speculations on this subject, we refer our readers to 'MacVicar's Elements of Nature.'" It will probably be found that not only the electrical force, but the magnetic also is at work in the composition of both oxygen and water, and that hence *the diamagnetic force*, no less than the actinic, or at least the electro-negative, must be brought into play in their demoleculization, or decomposition. Practical chemists, interested in the reported though still doubtful discovery of Mr. Paine, we may further refer to "Graham's Chemistry," and to our own remarks,* on the probable esoteric constitution of such "elements" as the metals.

NEW LAUNDRY, &c., ST. PANCRAS PARISH.—The vestry of St. Pancras have determined to erect a new laundry and kitchen at the back of the workhouse,—cost about 2,000*l.* Mr. Lockyer architect. The industrial training school for this parish is nearly completed.

* Vide, on Metals in a previous volume.

Miscellanea.

SOCIETY OF ARTS.—The annual distribution of prizes took place on the 22nd instant. Lord Colborne in the chair. The secretary read the council's address, from which it appeared that 250 members had joined the society since the last report. A sum of 7,288*l.* odd had been contributed to the International Exhibition of Industry, by members. A special prize list for 1851 was then announced, and the prizes for the present year were awarded by the chairman. The list alluded to relates to treatises on the international exhibition and its several sections.

SCOTTISH FINE-ART ASSOCIATION.—The annual general meeting of the Royal Association, at Edinburgh, for distribution of works of Art, and other purposes, was held on Saturday last in the Music Hall, George's-street, the Lord Provost in the chair; when the secretary, Mr. J. A. Bell, read the report of the committee of management, from which it appears that the amount of subscriptions for the year is 3,460*l.*, of which 1,258*l.* have been expended on painting, 405*l.* on sculpture, and 775*l.* on engravings. Resolutions were passed, and the prizes drawn by ballot as usual.

WESTMINSTER.—The Wesleyan Norman schools in the Horseferry-road are making rapid progress, and will startle by their size and extent those who see them for the first time. They are of Bath stone and brick, of the Perpendicular period, and are being built by Messrs. Curtis, under the direction of Mr. Wilson, at a cost (we are told) of about 20,000*l.* An octagon lantern over the entrance to second quadrangle may be seen at some distance around.——The church in St. Anne-street is getting fast on towards completion: it has a very large east window.——The public baths and washhouses are being built close by.

THE WANT OF A COMMON CENTRE IN LONDON FOR MEASURING DISTANCES.—No defect in our improved modern metropolis is more inconvenient than the want of some particular point from which the various roads should be measured. At the present time there are no less than ten or eleven different places from which distances are calculated, and all of them very wide apart. The catalogue runs thus:—Hyde-park-corner and Whitechapel Church, the Surrey side of London-bridge and of Westminster-bridge, Shoreditch Church, Tyburn-turnpike, Holborn-bars (long since removed), "the place where Saint Giles's Pound formerly stood," and "where Hick's-hall formerly stood," "the Standard in Cornhill" (of which the exact site is unknown), and "the Stones' End in the Borough," which moves with the extension of the pavement. Thus the exact distance of any place cannot be known without minute inquiry and a local knowledge of London. One remedy would be in adopting the mileage from the Post-office, the frontage of which could not be more appropriately adorned than by an obelisk, which would become a "London stone," inscribed with the names and the distances of large provincial towns, similar to that which stood in the Forum of ancient Rome. The vicinity likewise of St. Paul's Cathedral, one of the most conspicuous buildings in London, recommends the Post-office especially for this object, and the turnpike-road trustees would not refuse to accommodate their milestones to it, under the direction of the Post-office surveyor.

G. J. R.

WIDE ESTIMATES.—I beg to forward you a list of tenders delivered for building two houses in Bonner's-fields, Hackney.

Boyson and Walsham	£900	0	0
Wheen	896	0	0
Bugg	867	0	0
Gerry	819	0	0
T. Smith	775	15	6
Pittman	765	0	0
Simmons	750	0	0
Rudkin	720	0	0
Smith	710	0	0
Pilbeam	720	0	0
Cooper	717	0	0
Taylor	708	0	0
Loynes	698	12	0
Walker and Soper	698	0	0
Hill and Son	665	0	0
Cooper and Bottomley	625	0	0

Any comment on the above would be useless. —A COMPETITOR.

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